

**Gretchen Kelbaugh is on a mission** to create plays, a movie about her great aunt, the militant suffragette



PHOTO: SUBMITTED

When she was in her 20s Gertrude Harding travelled from her home in Wesford to live in London, England. She ended up playing a pivotal role in a group of women campaigning for the right to vote.

Kelbaugh is still hoping one day to sell the screenplay, entitled *Hardie*. In the meantime, however, she's using the stage to get more recognition for her great aunt.

Last year, Kelbaugh wrote the short opening act of a play on Harding, and submitted it to TNB New Voices to see if it would qualify for further development. The play was chosen among the submissions and Kelbaugh received help this year – both through Notable Acts and PARC – from two different dramaturges.

In August, a 10-minute version received a public reading at Notable Act's annual summer theatre festival. Then, came this month's public reading at the TNB Studio.

Kelbaugh found the guidance of the two dramaturges invaluable in helping her develop the script, which she would like to see expanded into a full-stage production.

"If I can get the play at least staged across Canada it will help to spread her name," she said.

Kelbaugh may get some help in her mission. Both the rehearsals and the performance of *Orchids Can Be Destroyed* were filmed by Christine McLean, a television writer-director in Fredericton, who is interested in producing a documentary about Harding's life.

As the centenary of women receiving the vote both in England and Canada approaches in 2018, Kelbaugh believes there could be a renewed interest in the history of the suffrage movement and Harding's role in it.

"Canada needs more heroines for one thing and the story of violence for a cause still resonates today," she added.

"I think it's interesting to ask the question: Is violence ever justified, and I think when it comes to self-government breaking windows is justified because if you don't have your self-government you are just slaves."



PHOTO: CHRISTINE MCLEAN PHOTO

Emily Bossé plays Gert Harding in the play staged earlier this month as part of Theatre New Brunswick's Extra Reading Series.



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In a scene from Gretchen Kelbaugh's play, which was staged earlier this month, Gert Harding takes part in her first poster parade of suffragettes. Lilian Lenton in the middle (played by Adrienne Fitch) warns Gert Harding (played by Emily Bossé) about the militants' upcoming Campaign of Terror. Cameraman Kirk Pennell records the play.



Gretchen Kelbaugh working in her home.

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